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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa: 1997-1998

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report, prepared in accordance with Governing Council decisions 19/17 of 7 February 1997 and SS.V/7 of 22 May 1998, covers assistance provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to countries affected by desertification and drought, especially those in Africa, in the context of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. Such assistance is seen as being provided through direct support to countries, regions and subregions, especially in the context of formulating and implementing action programmes. It is also detailed under support to project development and implementation through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and in direct and indirect support to the Convention to Combat Desertification, especially through UNEP's work on behalf of the Committee on Science and Technology of the Convention.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to consider the adoption of a decision along the following lines:

* UNEP/GC.20/1.

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The Governing Council,

Recalling its decisions 19/17 of 7 February 1997 and SS.V/7 of 22 May 1998,

Recognizing that land degradation is a major problem for many countries, particularly those in Africa,

Recalling the experience of the United Nations Environment Programme in developing desertification assessments, databases and its two editions of the World Atlas of Desertification, its research initiatives and cooperative studies with the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment of the International Council of Scientific Unions, its co-sponsorship of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research and the numerous joint programmes and studies on desertification with various centres of the Consultative Group and with other United Nations organizations,

Considering the concerns regarding the vulnerability of African soils to the impacts of climate change due to land degradation and desertification as expressed at the Ministerial Session of the Special Consultation of African Ministerial Conference on Environment on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol and related Multilateral Environmental Agreements, held in Nairobi in October 1998 (UNEP/AMCEN/CONSULT.1/5, para. 33 (a));

Welcoming the efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme in assisting countries affected by land degradation, in strengthening cooperation and collaboration with other relevant United Nations bodies and agencies and other organizations in the field of land degradation, in developing land-degradation projects as they relate to the focal areas of the Global Environment Facility and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Development Programme in the context of these activities, and in assisting Governments in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa,

1. Requests the Executive Director to maintain the capability of the United Nations Environment Programme to respond to global land-degradation issues so as to serve its role as Task Manager for Agenda 21, 1/ chapter 12 (and related other chapters), and in supporting the Conference of Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, in particular its Committee on Science and Technology in the assessment and monitoring of desertification and the enhancement of the scientific and technological knowledge base on land degradation;

2. Requests the Executive Director to continue efforts to secure and enhance support from the Global Environmental Facility for providing

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1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I and Vol. I/Corr.1, Vol. II, Vol. III and Vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), Vol. I: Resolutions Adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II.

assistance to countries to carry out activities related to land degradation in view of the interlinkages between land degradation and the focal areas of the Global Environmental Facility;

3. Also requests the Executive Director to strengthen coordination and collaboration with relevant United Nations bodies and agencies and other organizations concerned in providing assistance to countries in mitigating land degradation and the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification;

4. Further requests the Executive Director, in cooperation with other bodies, particularly the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Global Mechanism under the Convention and the other implementing agencies of the Global Environment Facility, as well as relevant regional and subregional organizations, to assist countries affected by land degradation, in the development of a pipeline of land-degradation projects for financing by the Global Environment Facility and other relevant financial mechanisms.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN THOSE COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING SERIOUS DROUGHT AND/OR DESERTIFICATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA: 1997-1998

1. Pursuant to Governing Council decisions 19/17 and SS V/7, UNEP has continued to support countries in the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, but because of reduced allocations the programme of work could not be implemented as envisaged.

2. In terms of activities at national level, UNEP supported the implementation of the Convention in the countries members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), using resources from the Russian Fund, in line with the decisions of the Almaty and Tashkent conferences of 1995 and 1997, respectively. The $4 million worth of contributions to UNEP from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, held in the Russian Fund, were unfrozen in 1995 for use specifically on UNEP projects in the Russian Federation.

3. Following the development of the national action programme for the Kalmyk Republic in the Russian Federation, UNEP is now supporting the implementation of a project on the reclamation and management of the Black Lands and the stabilization of moving sands in Kalmykia. The completion of the national action programme for Kazakhstan in 1997 was followed by awareness-raising campaigns on the issue in 1998. The programme for Uzbekistan is still under preparation. UNEP also supported a training course in desertification control for 28 participants from CIS countries, which was held in Volgograd, in the Russian Federation, in October 1997.

4. In a drive to promote the ratification of the Convention to Combat Desertification by the Russian Federation and to catalyse action, UNEP assisted with awareness-raising activities in the region, by supporting the locally produced newsletter on desertification. In addition, the Kalmyk sequences of a film made for UNEP by Television Trust for the Environment (TVE) and financed by the Government of Norway, have been repackaged into Russian. Accompanied by a booklet and posters, the film is being disseminated to schools throughout the steppe region. A film in Russian on the problem of shifting sands invading south-eastern Europe was completed and an English version has been produced to ensure wider dissemination.

5. UNEP, with counterpart funds from the Government of Norway, is assisting in the awareness-raising component of the national-action-programme formulation process in South Africa, as a pilot project for outreach in the southern African region. A strategy meeting in December 1997 resulted in an action programme of activities to be undertaken for the launch of the awareness-raising campaign in June 1998. The launch took place on 17 June in Pretoria at the end of the National Environmental Film Festival.

6. UNEP has been particularly involved in the regional and subregional action-programme process, through participating in and supporting subregional meetings on the Convention. In 1997, such meetings were held in Cuba, Burkina Faso, China, Spain and the Syrian Arab Republic. In 1998, UNEP supported meetings for West Asia in Oman, for Asia and the Pacific in Japan and Thailand, and for Latin America and the Caribbean in Antigua and Barbuda and Brazil. UNEP offered to assist in coordinating the thematic programme

networks which are to be established under the regional action programme for Asia and the Pacific. UNEP further offered to host a regional coordination unit within the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the associated memorandum of understanding between the Government of Mexico, the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification and UNEP was signed in July 1998.

7. Assistance was also provided for the development of subregional action programmes for the southern European (Kalmykia, Dagestan, and Tatarstan republics, Volgograd, Astrakhan, Saratov and Samara regions) and Asian (the republics of Tuva, Khakass and Buriatia) parts of the Russian Federation.

8. As part of a special focus on Africa, UNEP promoted the development of subregional action programmes for the members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), by supporting workshops to establish multidisciplinary scientific and technical consultative committees in Namibia, in June, and in Nairobi in July 1998. At the request of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), UNEP supported a workshop on women and decision-making, which was held in Dakar.

9. , UNEP also hosted and supported the Special Consultation of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol and Related Multilateral Environmental Agreements, held in Nairobi in October 1998, for which the UNEP Land Unit gave substantive inputs. In addition, UNEP supported a workshop on a network for the integration and management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins in Africa, held in Abidjan in September 1998. The latter was one of the seven workshops called for in the context of the regional action programme to combat desertification for Africa by the Panafrican Conference on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Follow-up in Africa of the Results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Burkina Faso in March 1997. The report of the proceedings formed an input to the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. UNEP has expressed its willingness to host the network through the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

10. Cooperation continued with other United Nations organizations and leading science and technology institutions and non-governmental organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations University (UNU), IUCN - The World Conservation Union, the members of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and others, contributing to a better understanding of the factors leading to land degradation and assisting countries to take action to control desertification. In this context, case-studies on population dynamics in the drylands of central Asia and the affected areas of eastern Europe, and on land tenure and environmental degradation in the Asia and Pacific region were undertaken. Further, UNEP, in cooperation with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Centre for

Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), organized an expert workshop for 19 participants entitled "Wind erosion in Africa and West Asia: problems and control strategies", which was held in Cairo in April 1997. Jointly with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNEP evaluated several potential success stories in desertification control, with "Saving the Drylands" awards being presented to worthy projects at the twentieth-anniversary meeting of IFAD and at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification.

11. As a co-sponsor of CGIAR and partner of many of its centres, such as ICARDA, ICRISAT and the International Council for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), UNEP contributed actively to many projects and programmes which add to the body of knowledge related to land degradation, one example being the Desert Margins Programme in nine sub-Saharan African countries, another multi-focus, multidisciplinary project which is being prepared partially for GEF funding. DMP implementation was facilitated by ICRISAT which has established a coordination office in Sadore, Niger. UNEP serves as a member of the Steering Committee on behalf of United Nations organizations and agencies.

12. Preliminary discussions were held in June 1998 between the Executive Director of UNEP and the Chief Executive Officer of GEF on UNEP's role in land degradation projects and UNEP-UNDP collaboration. UNEP initiatives in land degradation as it relates to the four other focal areas of GEF focused on assessments, regional, subregional and transboundary projects; demonstration, pilot and experimental approaches; targeted research and methodological frameworks; capacity-building and technical assistance and environmental information and reporting.

13. UNEP has started to implement a project largely financed by GEF and entitled "People Land Management and Environmental Change (PLEC)", executed by the United Nations University (UNU), which is a multi-disciplinary project on the conservation of agrodiversity in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and South and Central America that was initiated in February 1998. Activities began in March 1998. A meeting of the Steering Committee (of which UNEP is a member) was held in Tokyo in July 1998, and the first meeting of the Advisory Group was held in Paris, in September 1998. National and subnational activities under the project continued in all project clusters: East Africa, West Africa, Amazonia, China and Papua New Guinea.

14. Two other projects, on conserving biological diversity in the arid and semi-arid transboundary areas of Mauritania and Senegal and on managing indigenous vegetation to rehabilitate degraded rangelands in Botswana, Kenya and Mali, have both been developed by UNEP and UNDP and approved for GEF funding. Several others covering different countries of Africa are at earlier stages of development under GEF funding.

15. As an overall contribution to the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification, UNEP has provided assistance to enable Government representatives and non-governmental organizations to attend Convention related meetings, and for government and non-governmental organization experts to participate in topical workshops and training courses related to desertification.

16. At the request of the Committee of Science and Technology of the Convention, during the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, and with funds provided by the Convention Secretariat, UNEP is leading a consortium to undertake a preliminary survey of organizations able to form part of a global network to support implementation of the Convention. UNEP also contributed to the consultative process on benchmarks and indicators of desertification held in Geneva in September 1998.

17. In line with the request for greater awareness raising contained in the Convention, UNEP also produced and disseminated targeted information on desertification control to a broad range of media and public at both national and global levels. Four issues of the Desertification Control Bulletin (Nos. 30, 31, 32 and 33) were produced, and new publications included National Land Degradation Assessment and Mapping in Kenya and Wind Erosion in Africa and West Asia: Problems and Control Strategies. The second edition of the World Atlas of Desertification was published in 1997. It summarizes the latest scientific knowledge on the drylands of the globe and was launched at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. Several films have also been developed to raise global awareness of the drylands in accordance with the articles of the Convention. One film, on migration and social problems and set in Ethiopia, was completed in November 1997. Another film for the World Service of the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC), on desertification as the legacy of past politics, featured Kalmykia and South Africa, while several short features were compiled for youth audiences, more information dissemination.

18. In the context of the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, UNEP organized a workshop for 15 participants from non-governmental organizations, on synergies and the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Convention, which was held in Nairobi from 4 to 6 November 1998. The results of this workshop, stressing the need for better coordination between various environmental conventions, formed an input to the Conference of the Parties, and especially to the forum organized by IUCN on linking the biodiversity and desertification agendas, which was supported by UNEP and held in Dakar from 4 to 6 December 1998, in conjunction with the meeting of the Conference of the Parties.